

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD”
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“The LORD is my shepherd.”
Psalm 23:1

I CANNOT say anything that is new upon this text. I have not even the desire to do so, but if I can remind you of old and precious truths, and also put you in remembrance of sweet experiences which are past, this will not be an unprofitable topic for our meditation.

I like to recall the fact that this psalm was written by David, probably when he was a king. He had been a shepherd, and he was not ashamed of his former occupation. When he had to wear a crown, he remembered the time when he had handled the shepherd's crook, and as a lad, with his sling and stone, had kept watch over his father's sheep in the wilderness.

Some persons are too proud to remember their early employments, though such pride is both their folly and their shame. Many persons would not like, in their public devotions, to make use of expressions which would have any reference to their secular calling, but it seems to be perfectly natural in David's case, to hear him say, “The LORD is my Shepherd,” for he had himself been a shepherd, and knew just what the word implied.

By the gracious help of the Holy Spirit, let us see what we can get out of the metaphor used in our text. We must, of course, remind ourselves that we are not in the country where these words were written, we must, in thought, go to the East in order to get the full meaning of them.

It is a great mercy that the Bible was not written according to the fashion of the West, for everything has changed in our part of the world. If this Book had been written, for instance, in the style of the earliest literature known in England, probably we would not have fully understood it, and other nations would have been altogether puzzled by it.

But in the East there has been little or no change for centuries. Oriental manners and customs are almost the same today as they were in the days of David, so that, if we could go to Palestine at the present moment, we might find just such a shepherd as David was, and in examining his habits and actions, we should learn the meaning of the metaphor that David used when he said, “The LORD is my Shepherd.”

We shall notice three things about the text. First, *this sentence, if it be true to us, guarantees us certain privileges*, secondly, *it involves us in duties*, and thirdly, *it suggests to us inquiries*.

I. First, if this sentence is indeed true of each one of us, “The LORD is my Shepherd,” then **THIS GUARANTEES US CERTAIN PRIVILEGES**.

And first, *the Eastern shepherd was the guide of his flock*. The sheep never thought of going before him, it would have been an anomaly in nature for the sheep to go first, and for the shepherd to follow. They had no need whatever to know the way across the trackless desert, it was enough for them that the shepherd knew it. They need not know where the green pastures still remained throughout the droughts of summer, or where there were quiet resting places where they might lie down at noon. It was sufficient for the sheep that the shepherd knew, and all that they had to do was patiently to follow where he led the way.

David had no doubt often gone on in front of his flock, thinking with an anxious heart of the place where he would lead them, and as he looked back at them, he could see that they were patiently

following him, with no distraction to trouble their poor brains, and no vexations to worry their quiet minds—happy that they were provided for, they grazed as they went along the way, not knowing, and not wanting to know, whither they were going, but quite content because their shepherd led the way.

Transfer this thought, Christian brother or sister, to yourself, and see how the Lord is your Guide. Look at the past, and note how He has guided you. How very little you and I have had to do with it after all! We have struggled, we have fretted, we have repined, we have fumed against the working of providence, but after all, I do not know that we have had much more to do with it than the sheep in the stream has had to do with the way in which it has floated to the other side.

There is far more of the hand of God in our life than there is of our own hand, if our life is what it ought to be. Think of our childhood, of the home where our lot was cast, of our youth, of the place where we were bound as apprentices, or where we first learned the rudiments of our various callings. And since then, what strange paths some of us have trodden! If we had been told years ago, that we should be found here today, in the circumstances in which we are now found, we could not have believed it.

There have been times in our past history, when it has seemed as if a single straw might decide our destiny. We were at the crossroads, and the left road might have led us into endless sins and sorrows, but we were guided in the opposite direction, and so we were made to walk beside the still waters, and to lie down in green pastures. There have been many times when only a word was wanted, nay, when a weight no heavier than a feather from the wing of a butterfly was all that was needed to turn the scale against us, and to send us into quite a different orbit from that in which we now move.

We can truly say that we have been divinely led until now, and although the journey has been like that of the children of Israel in the wilderness—in and out, backwards and forwards, progressing and then retrograding, and often standing still—yet the Lord has led us by a right way up to this present moment, and we can truthfully say—

*“Still have we found that promise good
Which Jesus ratified with blood;
Still is He faithful, wise, and just,
And still in Him let Israel trust.”*

It is easy to say that the Lord has been our Shepherd in the past, it may not be so easy to say that He is our Shepherd in the present, and will be our Shepherd in the future. Yet we have nothing to do with the future except to follow in the path of humble trust in the Lord, and of obedience to His Word. It is not for me to sit down, and make a plan of all I mean to do next week, or next month, and so on through all my life.

I have no right to forestall my troubles, or to begin to calculate my future wants. I am bound to live in simple dependence upon God, who sends just enough manna for each day, but no more. If I am in any dilemma, if I am in any difficulty, if I do not know which way I should take, had I not better go and tell my Heavenly Father so, and ask Him to direct me?

I must remember that I am not my own shepherd, and that I am not to guide myself any more than the sheep is to guide itself, but that I am to look to my great Shepherd, to watch for indications of His will, and to receive those indications either from His Word, or from His providential dealings with me, or from the operations of His gracious Spirit within my heart, and then I am to follow where God leads me, having nothing to do with the making of the road, but only following the Lord my Shepherd wherever He leads me.

Dear brethren and sisters in Christ, I wish we recollected this truth more than we do, I mean, in all things. For instance, in the matter of doctrinal opinions, some people have a certain minister as their shepherd, you know that there are certain people who will not go an inch beyond the point to which Mr. A____ leads them. Then Mr. B____ is the prophet of somebody else, Mr. C____ is the very pope of

another, and Mr. D_____ is the perfection of doctrine to a fourth, and beyond these earthly leaders none of them will go. Let us, however, all follow the Lord as our Shepherd. I am to make my appeal to this blessed Book, and to ask His gracious Spirit to teach me what is here revealed, and when His Spirit has taught it to me, I am to let that be sufficient, and to believe it. Even if I am the only person who so believes it, that shall make no difference to me. If God has guided me, I must follow.

So is it with regard to all the various stages of our life. The young Christian ought to seek God's guidance in the important matter of marriage, and the young tradesman should seek divine guidance as to where he shall set up his business, or commence his daily labor. In emigrating to another land, in removing from one house to another, in every step of life, we act wisely when we say, “O Lord, let everything be as Thou wilt, we bring hither the ephod that we may inquire what is Thy will even as they did of old.”

There ought to be a distinct recognition on our part that we desire that God should guide us, and we should constantly come to Him to consult with Him, for if we do not, we shall be constantly making mistakes, and getting into confusion, and then, who but ourselves shall bear the blame, in that we went before the fiery cloudy pillar, chose our own path, and so fell into the ditch?

One of the Puritans said, “He who carves for himself will cut his fingers, and get an empty plate,” and it is so in the order of God's providence. And another said, “He who runs before the cloud goes on a fool's errand, and will have to come back again,” and so it shall be. The sheep before the Shepherd is out of place and out of order, but the sheep behind the Shepherd, quietly, patiently, and humbly following him, is both according to the order of nature and the order of grace.

Let us then, as the Lord's sheep, learn to take that position henceforth, and not attempt to usurp the prerogative of our great Shepherd.

Another great privilege which naturally comes to us through this relationship is that *we have provisions for our wants*. An Eastern shepherd, of course, provides for his flock as far as he can. This may not be a very difficult matter in England, but it is exceedingly difficult in countries where fodder is not so readily obtainable as it is here. In the summer droughts, the shepherd will have to go on foraging afar, and when those droughts have continued a long while, there will be only a few places, by the margins of the deep rivers, where grass can still be found.

Then the prudent shepherd, as soon as he finds that the winter is coming on, will seek to shelter his flock in those secluded pastures which still remain green, and then, as spring returns again, he conducts them to the spot where the young grass is waiting for them. He has to be thoughtful ever, and they have to be thoughtful never, at least with regard to their daily provender.

He thinks of autumn while it is still springtime, and he has his eye upon the winter even in the midst of the summer. As for the sheep, it is enough for them if they lie down in the grass that is nearest to them, or walk gently by the still waters just where they are.

Now certainly, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, as the Eastern shepherd thus provides for his sheep, so will God provide for us. We have a double set of wants, yet we shall find that God is as all-sufficient for us as He would be if we had a sevenfold set of wants.

I say that we have a double set of wants. There are, first, our bodily wants, and these are many, and they are constantly recurring. I am not quite certain that to have a sure provision for this life is the most excellent thing for our spirituality. It is of course the most comfortable thing, and in many respects, the most desirable, and gives the most opportunities for usefulness. But I am not sure whether fullness of bread is not always a very great temptation.

Certainly, if I have wanted to find deep, robust, vigorous piety, I must confess—though I have no preference for one class over another—that I have usually found it amongst those who have had to live from hand to mouth, and to struggle hard for their daily bread, for this experience brings men and women into real and palpable contact with the God of providence, and as I appeal to these children of poverty, and ask them whether God supplies their needs, they take out their little diaries, or if they do not carry them in their pockets, they carry them in their hearts, and they begin to tell of instance after

instance in which the God of Abraham has revealed Himself to them as JEHOVAH-JIREH, and as they look forward to the future, they confidently cry, “The LORD will provide.”

Sometimes, such a promise as this, “Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure,” is very sweet to me, but when I have heard it from the lips of some poor bedridden old woman, who has long been depending upon the charity of others, and she has told me of remarkable interpositions of the Lord’s hand in her times of need, then the promise has seemed to glisten and glitter with unusual and extraordinary radiance.

Are not some of you, dear friends, sometimes in such a plight that you have to say in the morning, “Where shall I get bread for this evening’s meal?” This must be a choice text for you, “The LORD is my Shepherd.” Remember that ancient promise, “Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”

Our greater want, however, is our spiritual want, and there are often moanings among God’s people because they are not spiritually fed as they ought to be. It is the crying sin of some ministries that they are not feeding ministries, if I am to believe what I am told by many of God’s people, they do not find the service of the sanctuary to be satisfactory to their souls.

Brethren, if we profess to preach the Gospel, and this is the case with us, it is a grievous fault on our part and we must mend our manners in this respect, but far oftener, I think, the Lord’s people are not fed because of their own folly. They look up to the pulpit, but they do not see much there, if they looked up to the hills, from whence cometh their help, they would never be disappointed. When we look to the pastor, but not to the Master, the Master says, “They are looking to the wrong person, so they shall get nothing,” but when we look to the Master He often supplies our needs through the pastor.

Let us esteem the divinely chosen channel as far as we should, but let us never forget that it is the fountain that yields the supply. Though you may be tempted to say, when such and such a man is taken home, “I shall never be able to enjoy any other ministry as I have enjoyed that man’s,” you must check yourself and say, “It is the same living truth that survives, it is the same God who still lives, whoever else may die.” “The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you,” and therefore you shall still be fed, for the Lord is your Shepherd.

He who can truly say, “The LORD is my Shepherd,” may make sure of a third blessing, namely, that of *constant keeping and safe protection*. How many are our enemies! Brethren and sisters, we are exposed to attack on all sides. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” A cold shiver has often gone through me when I have witnessed or heard of the falls of some whom I have honored and respected, and of whom I would have said that it was more likely that the stars would fall from their orbits than that these people should fall from their integrity.

But alas! the best of men are but men at the best, and some brightly shining objects in the church’s sky have proved to be only meteors, “wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.” It is pitiable, and it is also humbling, and it should lead to great heart searching, and make each one of us ask, “Shall I forsake Him too?” And why should you not do so? What is there in you, dear friend, more than there is in any other professor, why you should not prove to be an apostate after all?

What is there about me that I should stand where so many others have fallen? There is nothing to hold me up if I am left to myself, but if, confessing my liability to fall, confessing my liability to be seized by the lion, and the bear, and the wolf, I can still say, “The LORD is my Shepherd,” I am safe!

The sheep is not safe because it says, “I am stronger than the lion,” or “I am able to escape from the bear,” or “I shall always be able to avoid the wolf.” Silly sheep, what can you do to protect yourself from your foes? Yet the sheep might feel safe enough if it knew that David was near, to snatch it out of the jaws of the lion, or to rescue it from the paws of the bear, and beloved, we know that our Shepherd will never let any of His sheep perish. He has owned us too long, and bought us too dearly, and loved us too well to ever let us go.

You remember that He said to His disciples, even concerning the children who believed in Him, “It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” He also said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any (man or devil) pluck them out of my hand.”

So, if you are the Lord’s sheep, you shall be protected, provided for, and guided till you reach the upper fold on the hilltop of glory.

You all know that the meaning of the text has not been even half brought out by these three thoughts, for *to shepherdize, to pastorize, to exercise the pastoral office, is a very great and important work*. The work of a true shepherd is not restricted to guiding, supplying, and protecting the sheep, there are a thousand other things that he has to do.

I think I have heard that there is no animal (except a man) that has so many forms of sickness as a sheep has. It may be afflicted in any part of its body, from its feet up to its head. There is not a single portion of a sheep but seems to be subject either to internal or to external ailments, it almost always seems to need doctoring.

A shepherd requires to be to his flock all that a father is to his family, only that he has fifty families instead of one. At certain seasons, he must be up all night looking after the lambs, and yet be all day watching over the sheep.

Then, in addition to their sicknesses, sheep have a great number of follies. If there is a hole in the hedge, they are sure to find it out and press through it. If there is the richest clover in the field, and nothing but dry sand outside, they will get through the hedge, and if but one leads the way, all the rest will follow it in its folly. If one should leap over the parapet of a bridge into a river, they would all follow, even though they should all be drowned. They are prone to wander and ready for all sorts of mischief, but they never assist the shepherd in the slightest degree.

In this respect, we are just like the silly sheep, yet our good Shepherd supplies all the needs, pities all the infirmities, and pardons all the wanderings of His poor wayward flock, we may indeed say that like as a shepherd pities his flock, and cares for them, so our Heavenly Father pities them that fear Him, and lovingly tends them day and night with constant care.

Just as Jacob told Laban that in the day the drought consumed him, and the frost by night, so that his sleep departed from his eyes, Christ can say that He watches over His blood bought flock, and keeps every one of the sheep with un-wearying care.

Now, brethren and sisters, I feel as if I could not say any more about these privileges of the Lord’s sheep, but as if I wanted to stop and sing about them. What music there is here—“The LORD is my Shepherd.” That little word “is” puts the whole matter beyond all question. “The LORD *is* my Shepherd,” then I shall be safely guided right up to the hilltop of heaven, I shall always be amply provided for, my fortune is made, and I shall be no loser come what may, my bank is good, and its wealth can never be diminished, while as to all other matters, protection from my foes, or whatever else I shall need between here and heaven, all is secured to me because JEHOVAH is my Shepherd.

II. Now, in the second place, I must speak more briefly upon THE DUTIES WHICH ARE INVOLVED IN THIS RELATIONSHIP.

As a shepherd has duties appertaining to his office, so also have the sheep. The first duty of a sheep—that which naturally comes to a sheep—is *confidence in the shepherd*. When I have heard people talk of silly sheep, I have often wondered whether, if the sheep could speak, they might not talk of more silly men, for of all the foolish things that a sheep never did, surely this is one—as it was in the meadow, eating the grass, it never did stop all of a sudden and say to itself, “I do not know what will become of me in the winter! There will be deep snow on the ground, and I shall not be able to get at the grass, I cannot really see how I shall be provided for!”

I never heard, even in a fable, of a sheep’s woolly head being disturbed in that fashion, it has a shepherd to provide for it, and it relies upon him to provide for all its needs. Yet you and I dear friends, sometimes do this silly thing, which a sheep would not do, we say, “We cannot imagine what we shall

do if we are ever in such and such circumstances!” We probably shall never be in such circumstances, yet we keep on supposing what we shall do if that is our lot.

Some persons have a little factory in their house for making trouble. When God does not send them any, they make some for themselves, and I have heard that homemade troubles are just like homemade clothes—they never fit properly, and they always last longer than any others. The trouble that I make for myself is sure to be a far greater trouble than any that God sends me.

You smiled at what I said just now, but it is a fact that many Christians, who might be happy and who ought to sing all day long, begin forestalling tomorrow’s sorrow, and as God will not give them tomorrow’s strength until tomorrow comes, they find their imaginary burden too heavy for their back to bear. You know how the brave little band of warriors fought at Thermopylae. Bravery alone would have been of small service to them, so they took their stand in a narrow pass, where their foes could only advance one at a time, and consequently, Leonidas and his brave followers, though very weary, could hold the pass against the Persian host.

Now, beloved, you are at the narrow pass of “today.” Therefore, meet your troubles one by one, and as they come, God’s grace will make you more than equal to them, and enable you to overcome them, but when you get into the broad field of months and years, and begin to think of a month’s troubles, and a year’s trials, you will fear that you will never be able to conquer them. Get into your proper place, and stand there like a sentinel who is willing, if necessary, to die at his post.

Our first duty then, as the Lord’s sheep, is confidence in our Shepherd. And next, *we must love our Shepherd*. Dr. Thomson, in his admirable work, “The Land and the Book,” tells us that in the East, there often springs up an intimate affection between the shepherd and his sheep. There are some sheep which will keep at a distance from the shepherd, if he sits down at one end of a field, they are pretty sure to be at the other end, but there are others which keep closer to him, and there are some which are so fond of the shepherd that you never see him without also seeing them close by his side. If he stops, they stop; if he moves, they move. They love the pasture, but they love the shepherd better still.

Dr. Thomson tells us that these sheep are generally the fattest of the flock because the shepherd is sure to give them the best of the food. They love him, and he loves them, he loves all the sheep, but he loves these with a very special kind of love, and beloved, if we loved Christ more, we would have more true happiness, more real spiritual enjoyment. I am afraid that some of us who do love our Lord are like Peter when he followed Christ afar off. We should be far happier if we could take John’s position, and lean our heads upon Christ’s bosom.

There is an election inside the election of grace. You know that Christ had many disciples, but that out of them He chose twelve to be His apostles, out of those twelve apostles, He chose three favorites, Peter, James, and John, and out of that select band of three, He chose one who was called “that disciple whom Jesus loved.”

They were all the sheep of the good Shepherd, and all of us who believe in Jesus are God’s children, but there are some who seem to be more dutiful and more obedient children than others are, and who walk in closer communion with their Lord, and these have the best of the Christian life, and the highest degree of spiritual enjoyment. I hope that you and I, who call Christ our Shepherd, do love Him much, and feel that the love of Christ constraineth us to yield to Him our heart’s deepest affection.

Another duty of the sheep is that of *following the shepherd*. It is a fractious, wandering, troublesome sheep that is always wanting to have its own way, and to go where it pleases. It is true that the shepherd still loves the wandering sheep, and that he seeks it until he finds it, but there is another thing that he does which the parables do not tell us, and that is, he punishes the wandering sheep.

When the shepherd finds his wandering sheep, he rejoices over it, but he takes care that the sheep shall not rejoice, and he makes it sorrow for having wandered from him. We are told, by those who have watched Syrian sheep, that they are often lame. A shepherd who was asked by a gentleman what made a certain sheep lame, replied, “I lamed that sheep, I did it on purpose.” “Why did you do that?” asked the

gentleman, and the shepherd answered, “It was always wandering, and I could not afford the time to go after it, so I lamed it, and it cannot wander away now.”

Sometimes when the sheep have been wandering, they get such a stroke from the shepherd’s crook that you would think it would break their backs. Certainly, this is what you and I will get if we are Christ’s sheep, and yet persist in wandering. Like the Eastern shepherd does, He will lame us because He will not lose us. He will even beat us because He loves us. Whether obedient children will escape the rod, or not, it is certain that those who are disobedient shall be made to smart for it as surely as their father loves them.

There is one other thing that ought to be true of me if the Lord is my Shepherd, and that is, *I ought to recognize His rights over me, and His property in me.* The Eastern shepherd is usually the owner of his sheep. He may sell it, or kill it, or do what he likes with it, and no one can dispute his right to do so. And a genuine Christian feels that Christ has an absolute right in him. Whether he is to live or to die, to sorrow or to rejoice, should be no matter of choice to a Christian, he should feel that whatever is his Master’s will is also his will.

The seal of an American Missionary Society is an ox standing between an altar and a plough, with the motto, “Ready for either”—ready to work in God’s field yoked to the plough, or ready to fall beneath God’s sacrificial axe, and to smoke upon God’s altar—ready, with Paul, to be offered up when the time of our departure is at hand. We have not a true idea of the rights of God over us, or even of our own condition before Him unless we feel that we are the sheep of His pasture, and that He may do with us exactly as He wills.

III. Now I want, just for a few minutes, to speak upon the third point, which is this—THE TEXT SUGGESTS A GREAT MANY INQUIRIES.

We must not flippantly talk as if all the promises in Scripture belonged to all of us, for my dear friend, it may be that the Lord is not your Shepherd, and if that is the case, the sheep’s portion is not yours. We ought to be very careful not to put God’s promises into the hands of those to whom they do not belong.

The other day I saw a little tract bearing this title, “It is certain that God loves you,” and I burned it, for I was afraid that somebody who had no right to it, might see it and believe that it was true. I do not believe that God loves every individual who might pick that tract up in the sense in which such an individual would understand the expression.

I know that God loves, in a certain sense, all the creatures that He has made, but such love as that gives me no comfort so long as I am an unreconciled sinner under condemnation because I have not believed in God’s dear Son. I dare not say to every one of you, “The LORD is your Shepherd,” for I do not think that all of you are His sheep. I cannot help fearing that there are some here who have no part nor lot in this matter, for they are still “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity.”

I am going to put a few questions to you, or to point out some of the characteristics of one who can say, “The LORD is my Shepherd.” If I am the Lord’s sheep, *I shall have something of the sheep’s disposition.* I shall perceive that His Spirit has wrought in me at any rate some divine gentleness. I know some professors who seem to me to be more like wolves than sheep. They snap their jaws like wolves do, and their very speech seems to be like a wolf’s howl. They dislike this, and they hate that, and they cannot endure the other, in fact, nothing pleases them.

A sheep has its likes and its dislikes, but it does not snarl, and snap, and howl, and growl, it is the wolf that does that, but the sheep is of a gentler disposition. A man who cannot bear an insult, is surely not a Christian. A man, who always revenges an injury done to him, is surely not a Christian, that is, one who is like Christ, “who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.” He could truly say, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.” The giving up of what is our right, the giving up of what we may fairly claim as our own, is the very mark of Christ’s sheep.

Again, *sheep are known by being gregarious in their habits*. They always like to be in flocks, and “we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” Many a time have I blessed the Holy Spirit for having inspired John to write that verse, and it is quite possible that some of you, dear friends, when you could not find any other evidence of grace, have been glad of such a mouse-hole as this into which your poor, tried, timid soul might creep and hide, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

A genuine love to the true children of God is a sure sign that we are Christ’s sheep, just as the fact that the sheep flock together helps to prove that they are sheep. May we have more of this love to all our brethren and sisters in Christ—not merely a love to some saints because they happen to be our own relations, or because they belong to our denomination, or because they agree precisely with us in sentiments—but a love to all the saints, as saints, for Christ’s sake—ay, a love even to the bad-tempered ones, the irritating ones, the un-saint-like “saints.”

It is very hard work to love some of these “saints.” I have often said that I know some good people with whom I would sooner live in heaven forever than live for half an hour on earth, for they always seem to look at things at so curious an angle that I cannot possibly agree with them. Yet I must love them for Christ’s sake, for if I do not love them, I must question whether I really am myself one of Christ’s sheep.

Another evidence of being a sheep is that *they are very particular in their feeding*. A wolf can eat what the sheep would not touch, for the sheep must have nothing but that which is sweet and clean to feed upon. We have heard of some professors who can enjoy very questionable food. Mr. Rowland Hill had a man in his church who used to go to theatres, and when Mr. Hill questioned him as to how he could make a Christian profession and yet frequent such places, he said, “Well, you see, Mr. Hill, I do not often go there, I only go occasionally just for a treat.”

“Ah!” said the good minister, “then you are worse than I thought you were,” and then he used this illustration. “Suppose somebody should spread a report that Mr. Hill was accustomed to eat carrion, well, it would be a horrible story, but suppose I should say, ‘Oh, no! I do not eat carrion every day as a common article of diet, I only have a little now and then for a treat,’ people would say, and say truly, ‘What a filthy taste he must have! What a horrible appetite to call that a treat which is so foul!’

So, my friend, when you say that you do not go into evil company except sometimes for a treat, that proves which way the wind blows in your soul, and proves the direction in which your heart is set. It proves that you really love sin, or you would not roll it as a choice morsel under your tongue.”

Oh, that God would teach us, by His grace, to estimate the true value of our actions, not by their outward appearance, but by the desire of our heart that prompts us to them, for if we are kept back from sin merely by motives of respectability, or because our fellows are looking upon us, we are as guilty before God as if we had actually committed the sin because our heart still goes after its filthy idols.

We may also judge whether we are Christ’s sheep by one or two texts which Christ Himself has given us. I quoted to you, just now, our Lord’s own words, “My sheep hear my voice.” Did you ever hear Christ’s voice? I did not ask whether you ever heard your minister’s voice, but whether you ever heard Christ’s voice. Did He Himself, ever speak to you so that you recognized that it was Christ’s voice that you heard?

Besides that hearing of their Savior’s voice, Christ’s sheep have a wonderful discriminating power by which they recognize Him. I heard a gentleman who had traveled in the East, say that he thought the sheep must know their shepherd because of the clothes which he wore, so he put on a shepherd’s garments, and went up to some sheep, but not one of the sheep mistook him for their shepherd.

Then he called one of the sheep by its proper name, but it took no notice of him, and that reminded him of our Savior’s declaration, “A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.” The sheep have such a keen ear that they can detect the tones of their own shepherd’s voice, and can distinguish it from all others.

So is it with Christ's sheep, they are not deceived by the voice of strangers, though others are deceived. I venture to prophesy that within ten years from this date, the whole of this country will be permeated by Popery. The advance that Romanism has made during the last ten years is so terrible, that if it continues to increase at only half that rate, my prophecy will prove to be a true one. The very name of Protestantism will die out unless God sends us a revival of Evangelical religion, for the fashion of the age is so set towards that which is gaudy, and sensuous, and sensational, and the whole trend of ecclesiasticism is so directly towards ceremonialism, that if we who love the old faith, do not bestir ourselves, we and our fellow countrymen will plunge into the Stygian bog of Popish superstition.

Some of you will hardly believe what I am saying, but if you will only turn your mind's eye in the direction to which I am pointing, you will see that the advance of Romanism and Ritualism in this land is quite extraordinary. The only people who will not be swept away by this tidal wave of ceremonialism, are those who have heard the voice of Christ, and so have the first mark of His sheep.

If you have ever been justified by faith in Jesus, you will not be cajoled by a so-called “priest.” If you have ever spiritually eaten the flesh of Christ, you will never degrade your Christian manhood by munching the man-made wafer-god. If you have ever really known Jesus Christ as your Savior, what will you care for the so-called “sacrifice of the mass”? You will know that it is only a Satanic invention to delude souls. If you have ever been regenerated by the Holy Ghost, the fiction of “baptismal regeneration” will be an abomination to you. If you have ever been vitally united to Christ, the living Vine, all the false and foolish talk about being saved by the power of sacramental efficacy will be as a stench in your nostrils which you cannot endure.

So I come back to the question I asked just now—Have you heard the voice of Christ? Do you know the meaning of the whispering of His Spirit? Have you passed from death unto life? Have you been transformed from a wolf into a sheep? Have you been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son? If so, relying upon the Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious blood has redeemed every one of His chosen flock, you can say, “The LORD is my Shepherd.”

But if not, and you continue to follow your own devices, they will lead you to destruction. God grant that this may not be the lot of any one of us, but may we all come, with childlike confidence, and put our trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the one and only Savior of sinners, and then shall each one of us be able to say, with David, “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”

May God bless each one of you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.